

Jill, dazed, saw servants stand, bowing before her, heard a hum of respectful greetings rise and fall as McTaggart swept her, ever on, down a corridor lined with statues, and into a room, endlessly long, with a painted ceiling and polished floor.

"Now!" said Peter. He laughed aloud, throwing a challenge to the walls, where on every side faces peered, measuring them with liquid eyes.

"Here we are, Jill—at home." He closed the doors as he spoke.

"Home?" Jill stared at him. "Peter—I *don't* understand."

A shade of temper was in her voice as she looked up in his laughing eyes.

"It's the Maramonte palace"—he cried—"Mine!—and yours now, my darling. Where my mother lived . . . And all these"—he waved his hand—"are my people."

Jill suddenly caught her breath.

"D'you mean to say"—her voice was tense—"You *live* here?—that it's . . . the house?"

"Yes . . ." he caught her in his arms. "Aren't you pleased?—It's my 'surprise!'"

But she pushed him away nervously. Wide-eyed she gazed around her. Then, still silent, she crossed the floor, and gazed out of the nearest window.

He followed her, a shade anxious. Surely, she could not be upset?

"Forgive me, Jill . . . I ought to have thought . . ."

But suddenly her face changed.

"The tower"—she whispered—"the tower of my dream . . . Peter, tell me—it is true? It won't go . . . fade away . . ." She clung to him like a frightened child.

"No—I swear it." A swift remorse moved him as he saw the tears well up in the eyes he loved. "Jill!—don't cry—for Heaven's sake. I meant it to be such a lovely surprise!—Why, my darling . . ."

She buried her face in his coat, struggling for control.

"It is!"—she sobbed—"it's *too* lovely! What a baby